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The issue of change: teacher and student

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Abstract

We are in a time when we talk a lot about change and witness many changes in every area of social life, including the education system. This study deals with the issue of change in education. Change is not good in itself because it is simply a change and people in the education system should not necessarily adapt in any conditions to such changes. Depending on the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the change, school people may or may not allow change to occur and to let it come or not in their lives. When it brings more job satisfaction, more confidence in the future and motivation to come to school, to learn for pleasure and the desire to know, then the change is legitimate.

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1. Introduction

It seems that today no one can stand outside change or that no one can resist the phenomenon of change, without being labelled as backward, nostalgic, dull, outdated or at the risk of being marginalized, left aside, laugh at, removed (from a community, organization, group, social context, project).

Of course, it is a record (for any ordinary mind and for any insight routine) that we live in a society of changes – in all areas and at all levels – and that it is a constant need to adapt both of people as individuals and of institutions as coordinators of a system, of leadership, of organization and of control over their members.

Under these circumstances, most of us treat change as something given, we do not reflect (anymore), we do not ask questions (anymore), we do not search (anymore) because we do not believe (anymore) there is something worth being reflected, asked, searched. The great majority no longer wonders over the strict meaning of the concept of change, does not see it as a(n) (important) and useful concern to analyse its content, features,

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functions, impact. There are rare interrogations about the significance of this concept, its mechanisms, stages, levels, its relationship with pseudo-change, disruption, disorganisation or even chaos/ anarchy.

Society involves change. It is a specific state of social life, culture, human behaviour. Social change is “the process by which a society or part of it is transformed into another state which differs qualitatively and quantitatively” (Schifirnet, 2004, p. 227). It can occur at macro or micro socio-level, it may occur (very) slowly, almost imperceptibly, or abruptly, dramatically (as a result of natural disasters, war, acts of terrorism, collective persistent movements, significant failures or unexpected successes, periodic evaluations or following major existential crises). We can also talk about surface, cosmetic or formal changes, or deep, structural, background, content changes; there are changes which are required by the internal environment of an organism (human, social, economic, financial, cultural, political, etc.) or changes which are required by its external environment.

There is no change for itself which is also beneficial. We cannot accept change for the sake of change, just because displaying an attitude in favour of change creates a positive public image or just not to oppose the general trend (given by most people who resigned to change and believe that – in fact – if “everyone” is doing the same, they do what they are supposed to do!)

Changes are not enough for themselves. They are not simply a benefit in that they are happening. There is always a vision behind every change, a key concept about life, society, institutions, people, happiness and death.

Changes always have a goal, they lead to a target. They favour some (and may disadvantage others). There have been tremendous changes: some have led to the development of humanity, others to the world becoming ugly.

2. Change and school

Change is one of the most frequently invoked issues by both administrators of the education system, by administrators of schools and by researchers in the field or by teachers themselves. Furthermore, it has reached the point that not only the word but also the act of change are used abundantly. In such a context, many school people are confused/ disoriented.

Some do not know which to follow and I think this situation – with numerous, unprepared and disjointed changes – emphasizes the crisis of education/ of (our) system of education. Others find themselves in the position that the stress of changes exhaust them, they are tired and thus enter a state of psychological self-protection, resistance and rejection. Another category of school people obeys simply what they are asked to do, trying to reconcile all requests and all constraints without being personally convinced and motivated that what they do is the right thing to do.

In these confusing conditions, a few useful and important questions should be asked for a deeper understanding of the issue of change and of a more solid foundation for the decisions on change: what is the relationship between change and changes in education? How many changes are needed (and at what scale and at what level) in order to speak of a (beneficial) change in the education system? How frequent should changes be for them to be bearable (and learned) by teachers? How should changes occur, so that they do not produce simple performers, pawns or players? What is the difference in attitude-behaviour involved by a change we believe in and another change we do not believe in? How do we (re)act in front of a change we believe in and in front of a change we do not believe in? What is the relationship between changes – as cohesion, continuity and discontinuity between them – so that they do not confuse us, do not cause further confusion, dislikes, ruinous confrontation between generations, exhaustion, resignation? What is the relationship between change and excess/ abuse of change? (because, as one can easily go from power to abuse of power, or from authority to excess of authority, so one can easily go from change to excess of change). What is the criterion according to which we can distinguish between change and abuse of change? What is the relationship between stability and excess of stability of the education system? Where does stability begin to become alarming and under which requirements? Where does it begin and where does it end the objective ground of change (the institution is in danger of aging,

degradation) and where does it begin and where does it end its subjective ground (it is the effect of a whim, of pride, of conceit, of frustration of a decision maker/ a team of decision makers)? What is the relationship between the desirable and the perverse effects of change (Boudon, 1998)? What is the relationship between the pace of changes in the economic and financial life and the pace of changes in the education system?

Some experts argue that change occurs through a process of organizational learning that takes place over time. “Change – is written by G. Johns (1998) – involves a sequence of organizational events or a psychological process taking place in time.” It requires a strategy that is adopted and individualized according to the particular context of each school, to the type of the problems they face and which need to be solved. In this sensitive process, teachers and students will be treated as an integral part of the strategy for organizational change and consulted about its introduction and performance.

Essentially related to organizational development, change strategy covers both administrative and bureaucratic issues, as well as (self)training of teachers, improving their organizational behaviour, and of the climate in the school, thus increasing the performance of its members and the degree of professional satisfaction.

Within institutions and within schools, there occur (or could occur) superficial changes or substantial changes.

Superficial changes are just about structural changes as it happens with education reforms coming from the outside (for example, those generated by economic and financial mechanisms) and from above (set by a restricted group of administrators who are, temporarily, in positions of making decisions). Implementation and compliance with these transformations are followed by (institutional) control levers. Superficial changes generated by the management of the education system are change-constraints, change-rules, change-norms, formal-institutional-administrative changes.

In their turn, substantial changes are related to the organizational culture of schools. We can speak of a fundamental change only when the change appears from the inside and it refers to the organizational culture and climate of the school. There are situations when, at the bottom, teachers themselves require changes in the activity and atmosphere in school. Teachers feel the need to change themselves. These intimate transformations should be understood as a necessity by those who best know the real problems of school and they are changes that people want, they waited for, are ready to fight for and sacrifice. For these changes, there is no need for (institutional) control. It is necessary that changes should occur by themselves, so that they do not produce jams or explosion in the system, or so that they do not expand complacent, artificial attitudes of teachers. There are changes that are related to the intrinsic dynamics of school life and teachers aspiring to do their job well, to have students and colleagues closer and cultivated.

3. Change, teachers and students

In the education system, there may appear macro-structural, formal, organizational changes – more or less rational, coherent, necessary – but also micro-structural changes in the classroom, or in the daily school life. “If changes take any point – as Hopkins D., M. Ainscow and M. West write (1998) – then they must record an impact on the educational process in the classroom - to enter the hearts and minds of teachers and students” (p. 35). British experts believe that “reality of change is not related to strategy, although it provides a framework for action, but to the implementation of strategies, and by this we understand the way they are interpreted and applied by students, teachers and school communities” (ibid.). It follows, therefore, that “if we treat the issue of change earnestly, analyzing whether or not the latter has a positive impact on teachers and student progress, then we have to come to the realization that change is ultimately individual achievement” (ibid.). After all, the ultimate aim of change is to increase job satisfaction of teachers and “improve student achievement” (idem, p. 28). Teachers accept change if they feel applying it, hope for the future was consolidated. In short, teachers are open to any transformation that strengthens their motivation to come to school and to be with their students.

As for students, there are at least two important aspects.

A first aspect relates to changing school life so that it is more motivating and attractive (a common problem, as you can see, with that of teachers). In comparison with (rising) indifference of students or their attitude of (more obvious) rejection, administrators, researchers and teachers feel that something must be changed.

Some believe that a closer link between school and the labour market more could make students more motivated in learning. With this repositioning, school would help them find a job more easily, find a source of income, a purpose in life.

Others believe that a (more assertive) technological life, and use of the wide range of new (virtual) communication technologies in daily school life is needed. Students could be attracted to learning because one would use the means that they tend to use more and more in their private life. They are means based on visual perception, image and, therefore, are more attractive than those based on conceptual, abstract perception. Students are favourable to screencracy.

Others believe that a solution would be to introduce a playful atmosphere at all levels of education (including in the university). Game is irreplaceable. It has (very) many cognitive, motivational, relational, formative virtues. Everything is to know how to play and how to invent games. Effort and strain keep students away from education. Concentration is related to other times. Attention of students can only be maintained if they like the subject, if their spirit of competition and confrontation is challenged, if their desire to win is stirred.

In the same context and very close to this solution are those who believe that change would refer to the renewal of teaching methodology. Active, participatory methods, creative and interactive, more motivational methods, in which students are placed so that a lesson is jointly constructed with the teacher and peers can be a solution to attract students, engage them for a longer time in the educational act.

In search of a source of attraction of students at school, other administrators, professionals and teaching staff believe that change must occur in the teacher's relationship with the students. The teacher should be more empathetic to the characteristics, interests, preferences and individuality of students. A more democratic and accessible/ closer atmosphere could revive student motivation for learning.

There administrators, specialists, teachers – more or less – who think about and propose simultaneous correlation of all these changes.

Looking more carefully, we find that these searches take place within the sphere of formal education. In this view, it is believed that the key to attracting students to school and trigger their desire to learn (constantly and with a real interest) comes within the formal school structures.

It seems that solutions can be found elsewhere. For example, in the non-formal education. Centred heavily on formal education, we lose sight of (motivational) virtues of other forms of education. We need to be more careful in its regard. We can think that non-formal education can be a less used source in the discovery of a solution to show students (and convince them) how important and interesting is learning in life. It seems that – regarded with great interest – non-formal education has great potential to motivate students and to attract them to knowledge for personal development.

The second aspect that concerns students in the context of the issue of change is linked to the result of their training.

In the psycho-pedagogical (classic) discourse, there are some axioms, we consider valid as such. They are not exposed to our critical thinking. One of them is referring to student preparation for integration into society.

Most system administrators and specialists in the field as well as teachers do not question such an educational principle. Effective school is one that “produces” socially integrated individuals.

Of course, putting the problem in these terms, one might understand that it is a challenge to the invocation of the fundamental objective of school. It is not about that, but it is a widening of the perspective or – more precisely – about a change of emphasis.

Reflecting more deeply, it seems that in a world of change, it is not integrated people that are urgently needed. An integrated man is rather a man assimilated by the structures in which he lives and operates. He seeks to answer (and meet) the best role he has and to the expectations concerning him; he is not out of place. Apparently,

the integrated man is at odds with the specificity of a society of changes. This - the society of changes - needs especially a proactive, creative, enterprising, courageous individual, with mature judgment who decides and does not act the way he likes or to satisfy his mediocre ego. The man of change is the one who is ready to fight (with self-sufficiency, with gimcrack, with superficiality, with falsity) (Tran, Vasilescu, 2003), to resist (bureaucratic tendencies, compromises and illicit “attention”, bad taste and ill-will), is the one who is asked to show openly/ assertively what he thinks and how he sees addressing problems.

In this discursive context, the fundamental purpose of school would not be the alumnus integrated into society, but the alumnus open to change. For this, it would take care of expressing concern at the peak of everything that can be expressed by a student, of the student's confidence building, of the balance and strength/ health of his emotional life, of finding a(n) (active, creative) sense in life, of cultivation of help, dedication, spirit of cooperation, devotion, of encouraging the spirit of initiative, of cultivation courage and strength to everything corrupts and degrades dignity of the human being, of best judgment and how problems are solved, as he can overcome uncertain situations, of the power (ambition) to investigate and the desire to find something new (for the good of people), of his attitude towards work and the fruits of his labour, of the joy of life.

4. Conclusions

Even though we live in an era of change, we cannot take change for granted, it is not beneficial in itself. To understand its meaning, we need time for reflection. We cannot accept it purely and simply because it is a change (but we cannot indefinitely defer it if it helps). It involves limits, on which our acceptance or rejection depend on. Depending on its legitimacy or illegitimacy, we allow change to come or not into our lives. School is also caught in this complex process of change. It is important that changes come as much from teachers, from students to bring them greater job satisfaction, and hope for the future and motivation to learn, respectively. As a concrete proposal, we recommend the organising of Changing Management courses within the professional training modules of the teachers.

The era of change needs a man of change. By this, school will address human development as a brave, active fighter, resistant to lie, to imposture, theft (Ghilezan, 2008b) and fraud (Ghilezan, 2008a).

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